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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000559

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: SE KURDS HOPE REFORM MOMENTUM WILL
CONTINUE DESPITE AKP TRAVAILS

Classified By: Adana Principal Officer Eric Green, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary and Comment

1. (C) Optimistic voices in the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) and Diyarbakir NGO community view the combination of Western pressure, alleged Turkish military set-backs against the PKK, and the ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP's) self-interest in expanding democratic reform as opening a path for significant progress on the Kurdish issue in the near future. They view recent ground-breaking events such as the Talabani visit and President Gul's meeting with DTP deputies as signals that the GOT may be interested in a cease-fire with the PKK that could open the way for discussing a comprehensive solution to the Kurdish issue. The optimists contend the closure case against the AKP could actually redound to the Kurds' benefit by persuading the ruling party that it can only protect itself by accelerating Turkey's democratization and EU processes. The pessimists caution that the AKP government is fundamentally insincere about solving the Kurdish issue and will prefer to manage it with small-scale reforms and increased investment.

2. (C) If the AKP succeeds in quashing the closure case, it could use its increased authority to undertake serious efforts on the Kurdish issue. But if the struggle drags on, hopes for a cease-fire or the actual laying down of PKK arms -- let alone significant progress on the root causes of the Kurdish problem -- will not materialize without support from the military, which is unlikely to want to extend any assistance to a potentially vulnerable AKP. End summary and comment.

Is This Challenge an Opportunity?

3. (C) Meeting with Adana Principal Officer in Diyarbakir on March 19, DTP Deputy Selahattin Demirtas cast a positive light on the current GOT upheaval, noting that "a time of deep crisis is a time to resolve serious issues." He applauded the visit of President Talabani to Ankara as a significant step in improving Turkish-Iraqi relations and said he believed contacts with the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) will follow soon. The land operation by the

Turkish military against the PKK will reduce public pressure on the military to undertake additional offensive operations. He asserted that, although the U.S. and EU had agreed to Turkey's plans for an incursion, they had conditioned approval on the GOT taking steps to address the Kurdish issue.

14. (C) Demirtas also expressed satisfaction with the dialogue opened the previous week between the DTP and senior GOT officials, including President Gul, though he was disappointed that PM Erdogan had (again) publicly refused to meet the DTP until it denounces the PKK. These talks, he hopes, could lead to a de facto cease-fire between the PKK and the Turkish military. He said it was critical to achieve a cease-fire prior to the traditional onset of violence that normally accompanies the spring thaw. He stressed that the DTP cannot deliver a PKK cease-fire at will, but if the DTP is treated as a serious interlocutor, its leverage will increase vis-a-vis the PKK. The AKP also needs to do its part to push the Turkish General Staff (TGS) to observe a cease-fire. (Note: Ceasefires have generally been observed in the breach; considerably more effective would be a PKK laying down of arms, which we consistently urge on DTP. End note.)

15. (C) A cease-fire, Demirtas said, would create space for both sides to start working on the essence of the Kurdish issue. Initially, the Kurds and the GOT would need to shape public opinion so that Kurds and Turks did not have such diametrically opposed views on issues such as amnesty. In addition, he said, greater freedom of speech needed to be established early in the process so people are not under constant threat of indictment for expressing their views.

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16. (C) Diyarbakir Bar Association President Sezgin Tanrikulu criticized the AKP for procrastinating on constitutional reform, which would have preempted efforts to close the party. Nonetheless, he asserted this is the last gasp of resistance by the old order to the AKP and once this case is out of the way the party should be able to continue on the democratization path unfettered. The Diyarbakir Bar and over 20 other local NGOs released a statement condemning the closure case. Tanrikulu joked that, if the AKP is closed down, he could face prosecution as well for opposing the action.

CBO: A Splendid Failure?

17. (C) Our contacts in the southeast are unanimous in believing that the late-February Turkish military incursion into Northern Iraq was a failure, contrary to the TGS's claims that over 250 PKK militants were killed. Bedrettin Karaboga, a Mardin businessman with strong connections to Northern Iraqi authorities, was convinced that only a handful of PKKers had been killed in the operation and that the Turkish military withdrew because its soldiers were freezing.

DTP officials also claimed that since the operation failed, its own popularity has increased. The AKP has also lost popularity because it authorized the operation; a sub-mayor of Diyarbakir showed us polling data indicating the AKP is still short of its goal of winning the mayoral election next spring. Optimists such as Demirtas and Tanrikulu believe that, following this set-back, the military will now be more amenable to stepped up political efforts to deal with the PKK. Others argue that the military will simply wait for better weather conditions and attempt another offensive.

Economic Programs, Broadcasting Rights: Where's the Beef?

18. (C) Yilmaz Akinci, a local journalist, said he was astonished that Erdogan, during a stop in Siirt during his recent swing through the region, highlighted establishing a Kurdish/Arabic/Farsi channel on the state TV network (TRT) as

a cornerstone of the GOT's approach to expanding Kurdish rights. Akinci noted that Kurds in Turkey already watch up to eight different foreign Kurdish satellite TV channels and the programming on TRT is deadly boring in any case. Tanrikulu threw up his hands at the mention of broadcasting rights, saying that the GOT "should be ashamed of itself" for the glacial progress on the issue. He pointed out that the law was changed several years ago to liberalize all broadcasting, public and private, but bureaucrats in the regulatory agency continue to block implementation. (Contacts at Diyarbakir's sole Kurdish-language TV station told us last year they have seen evidence that the TGS directly influences these regulatory decisions.)

19. (C) Recent GOT promises of a \$12 billion economic package for the southeast have also been met with skepticism. Officials at a rural development NGO said they suspect the focus of the program will be completion of the GAP (Southeast Anatolian Project) hydropower and irrigation scheme in five years. Such a plan would be welcome, they said, but to date, the GAP's dam-building -- which produces electrical power for western Turkey -- has taken priority over digging irrigation canals, which contribute to employment in the region.

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